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ABSTRACT

Giving children opportunities to image and draw the words in the text and what they represent tends to unblock and extend children's potential abilities to assimilate and synthesize language. Evaluation of representational drawing need not be a barrier which discourages teachers from allowing children to draw. In effect, it might be judicious to suggest evaluating representational drawing and reading skills concurrently. A simple checklist, either mental or written, indicating if the main subject(s) and a fair number of descriptive elements are present in a drawing, gives the teacher a visual picture of children's comprehension and a sense of those children who appreciate drawing in order to comprehend their reading. Examples of children's illustrations of passages from stories demonstrates what teachers can look for in children's drawings which will convey to the teacher that children understand the passages and the elements within them. Ultimately, teachers might consider enhancing and enriching their reading program by providing children opportunities to "see" language through visual literacy. (Three figures of drawings are included; 22 references are attached.) (RS)

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"But I don't 'see' what it means!" "I don't 'see' a difference." "I can read the paragraph but I can't 'see' what it describes!" These innocently mumbled remarks made while children read a story may be a signal to classroom teachers that the reading lesson needs to be reinforced visually.

Teachers do know that young children have a propensity to draw and sometimes could use drawing experiences to enhance their understanding of stories. But, there are a number of daily curriculum decisions to weigh and teacher inadequacies to cope with before teachers can confidently attempt revising a reading program. For instance, one major pragmatic question that might come to teachers' minds could be: How critical is it that children be given the opportunity to draw when reading stories? Then, considering educational value in having children draw might be established, a realistic instructional question teachers might ask is: Is there a method that can be used similar to, and perhaps along with, reading assessment procedures which evaluate children's drawings that accompany stories? In other words, what can a teacher expeditiously look for in children's drawings which conveys to the teacher that children understand the passages and comprehend the elements within those passages of stories children are reading?

In response to these questions, this article presents a literary review which reflects the importance of including representational drawing in a reading program, followed by a representational drawing evaluation procedure which can readily be used in accordance with existing other reading assessment procedures.

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The Importance of Drawing in Language Arts

Reading/language educators report that, besides using drawing for artistic expression and emotional enjoyment, many children draw to explore and understand language. Graves (1983) sees young children use drawing as a rehearsal and scaffolding technique while learning to write, read, and comprehend language. Hennings (1986) believes drawing helps children decode words and understand story-language patterns. Bean and Bouffler (1987) predicate that children can use drawing to learn spelling during their writing. Rhodes and Dudley-Marling (1988) and Walsha (1982) report children use drawing to generate and organize ideas for reading and writing purposes.

The majority of research studies on the relationships between the development and understanding of language and drawing is investigated through observation and descriptive procedures. Researchers, such as Dyson (1990), Calkins (1986), and Hubbard (1989), observe, record, and analyze teachers and students in natural classroom settings. The contribution from this research consistently reaffirms children use drawing collaboratively during the writing, speaking, and reading language process. These researchers ascertain that children sometimes use drawing preceding writing activities (as a rehearsal), during the process of writing (as a support), and as a stimulus to generate additional writing. Olson's study (1988), suggests that it is highly possible when visual experience does not take place, specifically drawing, some visually-oriented children's learning becomes impeded to the extent that they become slow and reluctant learners.

This brief review of the language arts literature and research studies suggests that educators are in consensus that drawing has an impressionable effect on young children's language learning.

Drawing from Stories in Children's Literature

To employ a procedure which analyzes drawing that represents thoughts and passages in stories, it is first necessary to choose books which would stimulate children's drawing. The type and kind of stories chosen depends on the purpose and genre of the lesson.

Teaching reading through children's literature and having children illustrate the story is not new. Johnson and Louis (1987), suggest several methods of including illustrating in reading lessons: 1) have children draw different parts of the story and then collate the class drawings into one big book; 2) read picture books without showing the children the accompanying pictures and have them draw their own interpretative illustrations; 3) divide the children into groups and provide each with task cards requiring children to illustrate certain passages of a book; 4) assign children to descriptively illustrate people, places, and adventure/action passages in stories.

Literary-Pictorial Analysis

Introduction

No matter what literature-based program is chosen, having children draw is important. This assertion can be supported by comparing the visual elements children include in their drawings with the words in a story, through a literary-pictorial analysis. The analysis system chosen for this comparison utilizes a combination of the mainline units of meaning proposed by Kintsch & van Dijk (1978), and the network system using pictorial proposition analysis by Kieras (1978). Kintsch and van Dijk's system attempts to identify concepts common to the reader and text, while Kieras's analysis shows relationships in and between concepts found in pictures. Together, these procedures provide a literary-perceptual framework which gives the teacher some idea of 1) children's ability to attend to the task of drawing elements from words in passages interchangeably and 2) to some degree, to measure children's capabilities of making a drawing which represent words and passages in text. It is, in a sense, visually outlining the pictures children think of as they are reading parts of stories. The analysis is a somewhat systematic way in which teachers and students can strategically review the process and products of the children's drawings as the children are reading a story.

One must keep in mind, however, that young children may include or exclude details from their pictures based on their understanding of the text. It is possible that some children may use their artist liberties to represent things in certain ways or they may begin drawing one idea and change their minds to illustrate something different. Giving children a task of producing a drawing which illustrates specific text, however, the drawing process becomes a retrieving, comprehension process of words and passages, which, in many cases, might be supplemented and embellished by children's creative artwork. Being aware of what to look for when critiquing a representational drawing gives the teacher a literal rendering of the children's comprehension of what is being read and how heavily certain children rely on the drawing for understanding of text.

Procedure

The first step in the analysis is to identify the portion of literature children choose to illustrate. To do this the teacher scans the literature and compares the drawing with the illustration. The teacher is usually aware of the child-illustrators' intention through conferences held during the reading assignment. Consider Brooke's attempt to illustrate a portion of a conversation between a fisherman and his wife (see Figure 1. *Fisherman & His Wife*, retold by John Stewig):

"I'll tell you what we need..." and her voice softened as she began to dream. "I'll have, let me see...yes, I'll have a cottage, set about with a white picket fence and hollyhocks growing at the entryway." (p. 4)

Illustration:



Passage: "I'll tell you what we need..." and her voice softened as she began to dream. "I'll have, let me see...yes, I'll have a cottage, set about with a white picket fence and hollyhocks growing at the entryway." (*The Fisherman and His Wife*, retold by John Stewig)

Network:

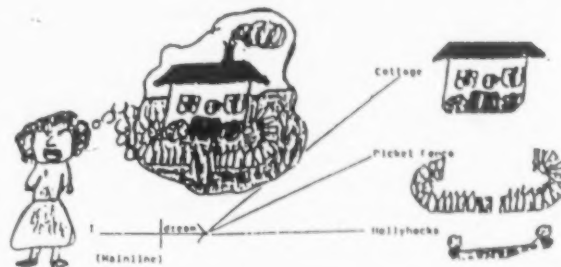


Figure 1. Brooke, Grade 3

After identifying the passage children choose to illustrate, the next step is to identify the main topic of the passage. The fisherman's wife dreaming is easily depicted in both words and drawing. Therefore, "I" and "dreaming" become the proposition mainline unit (equivalent to identifying a subject and verb). The rest of the passage emits a network of secondary supportive and modifying picture and word propositions, words and phrases which describe or tell more about "I" and the "dream" (such as "white picket fence" and "hollyhocks growing at the entryway" describing the exterior of the cottage). This network identifies the vocabulary used in the passage that is portrayed in the illustration. The analysis shows that Brooke completed the task of decoding verbal information visually and successfully recorded this information graphically.

Other observations can be made of elements in Brooke's illustration that are not apparent in the words. For instance, Brooke visualizes the fisherman's wife needing to close her eyes tightly to depict dreaming—an extended visual interpretative thought which comes from a verbal stimulus. Also, not having yet seen the original book illustrations, Brooke imagines the fisherman's wife to be young, beautiful, and with a lovely perm—an artistic schematic image common to young girls. These observations are consistent with Freeman and Janikoun's (1972) and Piaget and Inhelder's (1956) assertion that young children draw essential defining features that they know about. Such represen-

tational drawings which use the process described above become functional when teachers need to assess children's visual comprehension capabilities and developmental growth.

In addition to revealing children's understanding of the relationships between words and pictures as represented in the network analysis, other language skill teaching is possible during and after the illustrating. For instance, to draw an object (hollyhock), or a situation (dreaming), verbal and perceptual processes must concur. Some teachers who have used this drawing strategy report that it is not uncommon for children who don't understand vocabulary or can't conjure a visual picture of a vocabulary word, search for definitions in dictionaries or encyclopedias. As a result, it seems plausible to state that this drawing strategy has the impetus to generate an interest in, and a purpose for, research.

Oral language can also be generated by having children talk about, explain, and share their successes and difficulties in illustrating through whole-class, group, peer, or individual conferences (Shanklin & Rhodes, 1989). Many times children draw an indiscernible mark or scribble which they believe represents an object or action but which is incomprehensible to a viewer. Through conferences, children can discuss why they chose to sketch what they did, and perhaps receive alternative drawing suggestions which might enhance their illustrations (Seigel, 1984).

Also, during illustrating, grammar lessons and contextualization skills can be taught. A recent study shows that children acquire more knowledge through incidental learning than through direct instruction (Herman & Dole, 1988), although some educators argue that direct instruction and whole language instruction are both necessary to a holistic reading program (Heymsfeld, 1989). In either case, discussing vocabulary or word meaning in context, for the sake of information necessary to change verbal messages into graphic images, becomes a relevant incentive for even the most reluctant learner. For instance, the passage Brooke chose to illustrate contains opportunities to teach grammar such as quotations, contractions, and pronoun inferences. It also sets the stage for discussing contextual information such as encoding, the ability to integrate words in context, and comparing new words learned in the passage similar to and different from those that are already stored in Brooke's memory.

Illustrating Passages and Protagonists in Stories

Teaching reading through children's literature provides opportunities to observe children's visual representational language. Many times, major characters in stories are not initially described or the descriptions are so vague that children have a hard time visualizing what's happening. For example, Joshua had a problem understanding the following passage for *How to Eat Fried Worms* by T. Rockwell:

Alan and Tom and Joe leaned on their shovels under a tree in the apple orchard, watching the worms they had dug squirming on a flat rock (pp. 7-8).

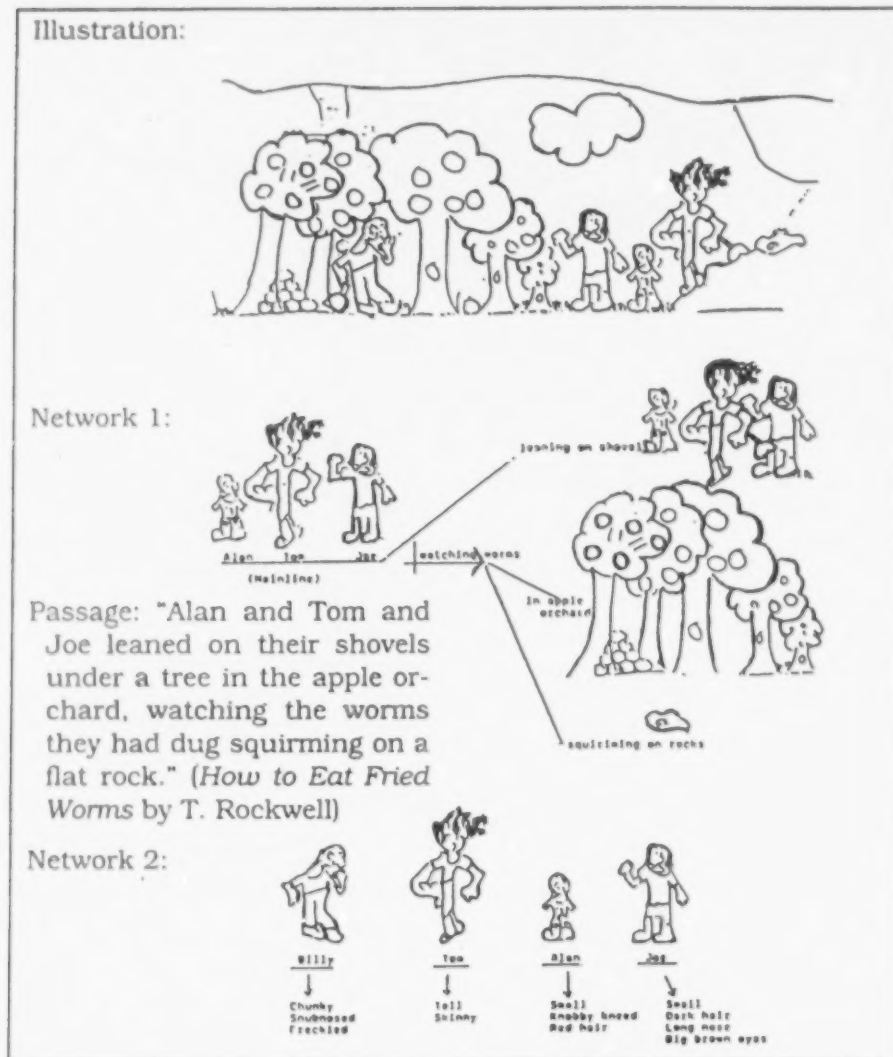


Figure 2. Joshua, Grade 5

Analysis shows there is one mainline topic (Alan, Tom, and Joe watching worms—see Figure 2), and two secondary and modifying networks. the first network (figure 2, network 1) shows Joshua's interpretative drawing of Alan, Tom, and Joe leaning on shovels, an apple orchard, and some worms squirming on a flat rock. Some misconceptions in Joshua's drawings can be found in the first network: Joshua pictures four boys instead of three, two boys leaning on shovels instead of three, and a rock that does not appear to be flat. Inclusion and exclusion of representational information occurs. Inaccurate visual information in his illustrations could be brought to

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Joshua's attention and he could be allowed to revise his illustration. Is this not similar to the editing process used in writing?

The second network isn't obvious to someone unfamiliar with the characters. Joshua was required to illustrate a passage and to draw the main characters in his illustrations according to the word descriptions in the book (figure 2, network 2). Drawing main characters allows Joshua to assimilate descriptive language into a graphic entity to which he can personally relate as he reads and encounters the characters through the story.

In sum, although Joshua's illustration shows a visual misunderstanding of some of the verbal information in the passage, he does show a conscious, deliberate iconographic aptitude to transfer verbal information into a pictorial representation.

What If Someone Can't Draw?

Not all children possess high artistic proficiencies as Brooke and Tom; not all students possess high verbal acuties when reading and writing. What are the expectations when evaluating a spectrum of children's illustrations? A range of different drawing skills and abilities can be seen in Joel's, Ryan's, and Phillip's illustrations of a passage from *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen (see Figure 3).

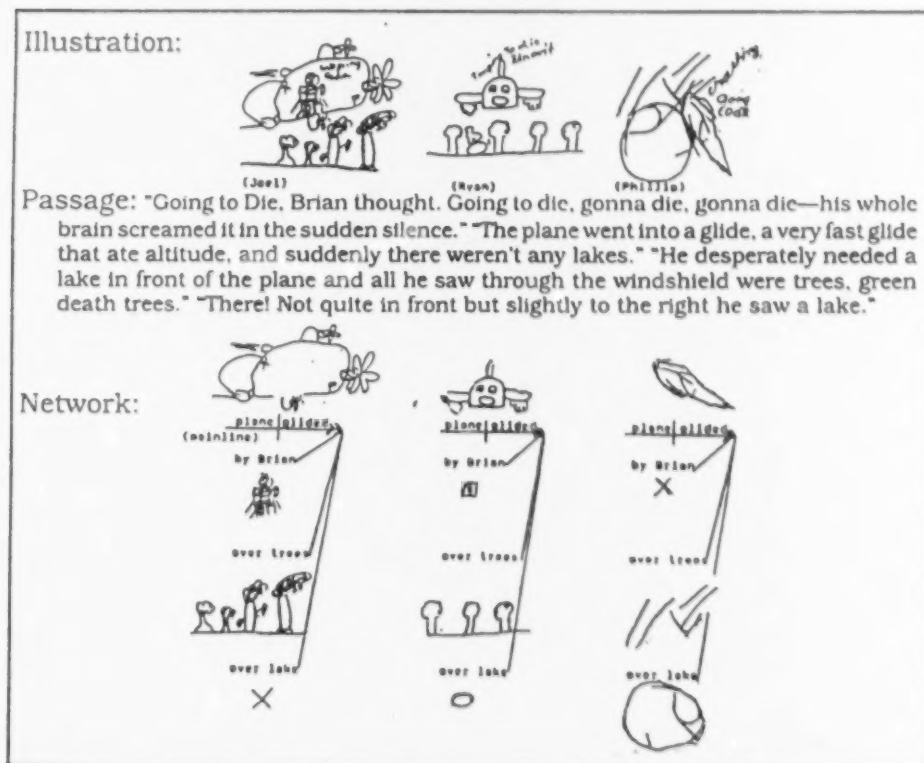


Figure 3. Joel, Ryan & Phillip Grade 5

The passage all three chose to illustrate is:

"Going to Die, Brian thought. Going to die, gonna die, gonna die—his whole brain screamed it in the sudden silence." "The plane went into a glide, a very fast glide that ate altitude, and suddenly there weren't any lakes." "He desperately needed a lake in front of the plane and all he saw through the windshield were trees, green death trees." "There! Not quite in front but slightly to the right he saw a lake" (pp. 26-27).

As children begin to read novels, they are encouraged to illustrate chunks of meaningful passages rather than sentences or short paragraphs. The literary-pictorial analysis can explicate individual artistic differences using complex story content. For instance, the mainline proposition stranding through these passages is "plane glided"; the network supporting propositions that emerge are the main character, Brian, the trees, and the lake. Joel's illustration portrays Brian, feeling distressed, riding in the airplane gliding over the trees. Although Ryan's illustration possesses the same information as Joel's, he also included the lake. However, Ryan did not depict the figure of Brian clearly, although Brian is represented. Both Joel's and Ryan's illustrations are decipherable—Phillip's is not.

However, Phillip did not produce his illustration fallaciously. In a conference, he confidently recited the intentions of his sketch and reiterated his understanding of the passage, using his sketch as a visual aid which supported his narrative. Although Phillip is not as skillful an artist as Joel or Ryan, his drawing represents a mnemonic device he used to retrieve information for oral recitation. Phillip's illustrations are similar to Graves' (1983) description of ten-year-old writers who use unconventional, unorthodox writing techniques as "speechmarks, prosodic markers," p. 165, to scaffold their propensity towards speech.

Summary

Illustrative drawing is more a function of eliciting information from text than it is an expression of creativity—although many times children produce imaginative, creative pictures. This is not to say illustrating is not an artistic process, because representational drawing does require the manipulation of artistic tools and requires the illustrator to use visual, spatial thinking processes—and, most children find drawing natural, pleasurable, and personally rewarding.

Giving children opportunities to image and draw the words in the text and what they represent, tends to unblock and extend children's potential abilities to assimilate and synthesize language. Evaluation of representational drawing need not be a barrier which discourages teachers from allowing children to draw. In effect, it might be judicious to suggest evaluating representational drawing and reading skills

concurrently. A simple checklist, either mental or written, indicating if the main subject(s) and a fair amount of descriptive elements are present in a drawing, gives the teacher a visual picture of children's comprehension and a sense of those children who appreciate drawing in order to comprehend their reading.

Ultimately, teachers might consider enhancing and enriching their reading program by providing children opportunities to "see" language through visual literacy.

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